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"AFIELD

—WITH THE—

ELEVENTH ARMY CORPS

—AT—

CHANCELLORSVILLE."

» » » A FIELD » » »

» — WITH THE — »

ELEVENTH ARMY CORPS

AT CHANCELLORSVILLE.

» — A PAPER — »

READ BEFORE THE OHIO COMMANDERY

» — OF THE — »

Loyal Legion of the United States,

OCTOBER 7, 1885.

BY COMPANION

OWEN RICE, Jr.

Late Captain Co. A, Acting Major 153d Penn. Vol. Infantry.

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The 11th Army Corps at Chancellorsville.

There is an exalted sentiment, that "feels a stain like a wound." In flippant rebuke of this, the non-combative critics of two generations, "ever hissing dispraise," have formulated a Chronicle of our great War, replete with distortions of pivotal events, to sustain the exigencies of adventitious theories, and, withal, conveniently forgetful, that to every man, in however humble station, who wore the blue in support of the most gigantic war of all time, to every man who, when

"God's arching Heavens were in eclipse,"

dared to die grandly, in order that he may have lived grandly, in defense of Freedom, the discerning judgment and ultimate award of time will accord a meed of honor, to merit which the older histories present few opportunities and few examples.

"Time and I against any two," was a cardinal maxim of the most subtle of modern diplomatists; and this philosophy finds generous vindication in a comparison of the judgments of the histories of yesterday and of to-day.

Among the somewhat numerous controverted points in these recitals, worthy to be tried by the square of common sense, and in the light of actual events, the conduct of the Eleventh Army Corps, in the battle of Chancellorsville, may well claim the charity of a Legion paper.

The popular belief in regard to this, based on extrinsic considerations, dissembling reports, and the unreasoning selfishness of cotemporary hyper-criticism is, that this organization, almost wholly German in nationality, composed largely of "petits chevaliers," whose ardor fluctuated with the tickings of some foreign stock-exchange,

had now become demoralized and contumacious, because of the removal of Sigel from command, with its covert indignities; that it was posted as skillfully and advantageously as any other division of the Army, and yet, with arrant poltroonery, gave way en masse, and thus, without justifiable cause, imperiled the safety of the Army and of the Nation's cause at a most critical juncture of the War.

Never, perhaps, was more sensitive or impressible crisis in the affairs of any people. With the menace of foreign intervention only held at arm's length by portents of the wasting energies and resources of the Confederacy, now chiefly sustained by tyrannous conscription, and the cause of the Union harassed by disaffection and half-hearted weariness at home, and by intrigue and privateering neutrality abroad, the world sullenly awaited the issue of the pivotal campaign of the War. Such being the gravity of national affairs, when fierce defeat befell the 11th Army Corps, to the examination of the justice of the charges against it, "nothing extenuate and naught set down in malice," and, by a chequered narrative of personal experiences and observations, to endeavor to contribute something in aid of the true history of the opening events of the campaigns of 1863, I ask your indulgence to address this record.

A candid examination into the nativity of the personnel of the corps, at this time, discloses, undeniably, that little more than one-third was German, or of foreign lineage in file and command, and of these a very large majority had become denationalized, and had accepted the plenary responsibilities of American citizenship. The ratio of nationality thus determined, as certainly shifts the burden of defense, against the opprobrious charge, upon the native majority, the unchallenged men of Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, Connecticut, and Massachusetts who distinctively and emulously wore the Crescent badge. Before essaying the common vindication, however, and I shall rest the defense on a succinct narrative of material events, and their primary corollaries, a hurried analysis of the constituent ele-

ments of the German contingent may not be inopportune, and primely because it has been invidiously assailed in respect to this disaster.

That among the Germans was found a small minority, tenacious, and that, with all the pertinacity of teutonic character, of the asserted superiority of the military systems of the Fatherland, is undoubted. Nations who count their lives by centuries generally grow proportionately, and often very disproportionately dogmatic. An unrebuked idolatry of both their martinetism and their servility—"more honored in the breach than in the observance"—still venerated the traditions of Rossbach. One regiment only, and that of the 1st Brigade, 1st Division, to which I had the honor to belong, seemed disaffected. Such expressions as "*Solch eine Kriegsfuehrung*," "*Du heilige Unschuld*," often repeated in respect to the organization and regulations of the army, indicated laxity of discipline and flabbiness of purpose; but, when on two occasions this regiment incontinently broke, under sudden attack, it became a by-word and a reproach, unendurable to its own countrymen. Its later record redeemed the recreant past on a higher plane of patriotic duty.

Another notable minority element comprised the Soldiers of Fortune—those errant adventurers, recognized in every war, whose only recommendation is their devotion and prowess, and who, without elan and endurance, lose rank and service. Typical of this class was Salm-Salm, who, with his regiment, had been mustered out of the service shortly before the inception of this campaign, but who had left the imprint of his martial idiosyncrasy upon some of his remaining countrymen.

With what solicitous avidity did not we who, in the lush comradeship of a winter camp, had shared his confidence, mark his brilliant career?

Always conspicuous, always under self-command: now foremost and now unhorsed in the hurdle-races with which Sickles, Warren, Collis and all of the hot blood of

the Army of the Potomac had beguiled the galling tedium of the previous Winter; soon under reporting orders to Mitchell, fretful of the curbs and restraints of inaction; again, at the Imperial Court of Mexico, the dashing chief of the undaunted Foreign Legion, that last allied the deserted Austrian; full soon the volunteer leader of every bloody midnight sortie, foremost to defy the beleaguered desperation and inevitable downfall of Empire at Queretaro; once more an American soldier, when, at the call of his superb American wife, Mr. Seward's little bell unbarred for him the vengeful prison doors, from which, on a glorious June morning, Maximilian, Mejia, and Miramon had been led forth to expiate their treason to the Republic; and now, at the Court of Austria, preferred by its Imperial Master for his martyrly devotion to the fallen Archduke, and the more than fallen, the living-dead Carlotta;—until, at last, when at Gravelotte, the re-invested Prussian Hussar went down in splendid death before the French mitrailleurs, was he not, always, the very beau-ideal of a soldier—was he not true to the symbols and inspirations of every cause that he espoused? 'Fore God, such men are not craven, and leave no imprint of cowardice behind them.

But what of Schurz, Steinwehr, Hecker, Bushbeck, Von Gilsa—undoubted representatives these of the large majority of the German element of the Corps?

Embittered by the gibes of malice,

“They bore defeat like gods,—
And such defeat! Or wrong, or right,
It takes as true a man to bear
Defeat like that as win the fight!”

On the bloody slopes of Gettysburg, with its three-fold baptism of fire, and on every field from Lookout Mountain to the sea, they wrote the courage of their convictions, in answer to the aspersions of vaporing zealots, and overwhelmed with unfaltering devotion those cavillers who demanded of them the impossible at Chancellorsville. No, Sirs, it was not the stubborn hardihood of the German, educated and inured by the wars of centuries to desperate

valor, turned craven here, by petulant and clannish selfishness ; it was not the thick blood, quick with sentient honor, from the times of the Electors to the days of Moltke, turned rheumy now by an accusing reminiscence of abjured nationality. Had not the inquisitions and dungeons of the Fatherland estranged them from all but the God-given spirit of Liberty, which these had nurtured and endeared? Refined by fire, may not their devotions have been stronger and purer than the stale mannerisms which, stained by the corrosions of soulless habit, many of us brought in daily orison to the shrine?

From the day of Calvary to this the more blameless the victim, the more turbid and insensate the savagery of the mob.

It was not, then, the defection of the Germans, nor yet was it the zeal and fealty of the native regiments, grown forgetful now of their common heritage and its imperiled destiny, that broke the lines in that first mad encounter in the devious and savage wilderness.

It was the persistent neglect of the plainest precepts of military foresight ; the utter disregard of even elementary principles of flank defense ; the deaf ear to the remonstrances and entreaties of Brigade and Division Chiefs ; the inexplicable contempt of reports, which, from an hour before mid-forenoon, until past mid-afternoon, followed the Confederate turning column, along the entire front of the lines, and enforced upon both Army and Corps commanders the sternest warnings of imminent assault. Ten hours of fatal incredulity and inaction ; the guard was open—the vitals were uncovered, and the thrust was almost mortal !

* * * * *

Passing now to narrative, and yielding to professional hands extended review of the strategy of the campaign, it is pertinent here only to observe that, up to the time of the concentration of the converging columns, south of United States Ford, every requisite of the general movement had been fulfilled with consummate alacrity and precision, save

that the initiatory part, allotted to Stoneman's command, had been belated fully six days by impassable roads and water-courses, and now became of minor co-operative value.

* * * * *

The early campaigning days of 1863 found the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia still controlling the lines of the Rappahannock, from Fredericksburg. To compass its capture, irreparable defeat, or summary retreat on Richmond, was the skillfully devised purpose of Gen. Hooker's campaign. In conformity with the general plan—while an equal force, under Sedgwick, feinted below the enemy's works towards Port Royal—on the morning of April 27th, the Fifth, Eleventh and Twelfth Army Corps, under the respective commands of Meade, Howard and Slocum, and now combined as the right wing of the Army of the Potomac, under the senior command of the last named general, abruptly broke camp, amidst the Stafford Hills, under orders for Kelly's Ford. Sixty rounds of ammunition, and eight days' rations in the haversacks, indicated the comprehensive character and lavish expectations formed of the initial movements of the campaign. No holiday jaunt of boyhood or sobered years, with its luscious romance, opened more buoyantly than did this march, and, "Oh the humor of it!" the delicious comedy, albeit unspoken, which attends the "Route Step" of a column in campaign. Withal, the spirit of the army was superb; its collective physique somewhat gross, overfed by an indulgent commissariat too near to the central stores, and the enervating luxuries, supplied by the contraband purveyors of the Potomac. Much impeded by roads, rendered heavy, almost to impassableness, by long-continued and copious rains, and the heavy marching order of the troops, the advance, the 1st Brigade of the 1st (Deven's) Division of the Eleventh Corps, had covered the thirty miles to the Ford, on the upper Rappahannock, before early twilight on the 28th. All of the columns were well in hand, for while awaiting the arrival of the pontoon train, which had lost the direct road, and while lying

within cover of the densely-wooded heights, under imperative command of silence, we were observing the movements of the unconscious picket guard of the enemy, patrolling the south bank with almost mechanical unconcern, we exchanged greetings with officers of the Twelfth Corps, who had sought our bivouac. The river was, at this point, admirably adapted for the crossing. An affluent creek contributed to form a narrow, densely-wooded tongue of high land, which not only masked all operations at the base, but also screened the steep road which obliquely scaled the bluff. Into the captive creek, auspiciously bank-full from recent rains, the belated pontoons were noiselessly launched, the barks and chasses deftly composed, and under guard of darkness, convoyed by an alert detachment in boats, before 10 P. M. the bridge was floated across the broad river and anchored and moored in face of the alarmed pickets, who, with a single random volley, dispersed toward Gordonsville.

A small Brigade of Cavalry, comprising three regiments, under Pleasanton, now covered the advance, and before mid-forenoon the three Army Corps had aligned from bivouac across the river, prepared for the dash to the Rapidan, the Fifth deflecting to the left, on Elley's Ford, and the Eleventh and Twelfth in direct march, on the wing for Germania. The coincident crossing of Stoneman's force at the upper fords of the rivers had so foiled and so fully engaged the attention of the Cavalry of Stuart, the only Confederate force within striking reach of Germania, to dispute the passage, that the advance encountered no concerted opposition, across the deserted champaign.

Then, too, knapsacks had by this time been covertly relieved of redundant clothing and camp bric-a-brac; the highway and hedge rows of Stafford and Culpepper had blossomed out with numberless overcoats, in lieu of suppressed verdure, to be gathered in by the hordes of land pirates who infested the rear, and after conversion into emulous shoddy, again to present themselves for regimental duty, at relatively enhanced value, during the following

Winter. Haversacks, too, were being depleted, in inverse ratio to their expected endurance, no aside suggestions of relief from burden being needed by the spendthrift appetites. An uneventful march, with, therefore, very much lighter impedimenta, carried us, after nightfall, to the ford, where the Cavalry and Scouts had surprised a small detachment of the enemy's engineers, intent on beginning the renewal of the superstructure of the high bridge, which here had crossed the river, and whose first impulse of resistance had been overborne by the second thought, enforced by advancing numbers.

Obviously, then, the Confederate Commander had meditated an advance, via the buttressed valleys, only forestalled by Hooker's muddy initiative, and, as certainly, this movement was, as yet, effectually masked by the diversion towards Port Royal and Stoneman's hampered dash.

The bonfires and torches, ablaze on the right bank of the river, now revealed a scene of weird and overpowering grandeur. The storm-riven mill, clinging to a rugged elevation to the west, and flanked by the black piers and charred ribs of the dismantled bridge, rising in columnar desolation—all the more desolate in the streaky glare—seemed in unequal conflict with the swollen, rock-tossed river in front, which, eddying and seething in whirlpool currents, and multiplying the glare of the beacons into innumerable corruscations, on the crests of their rolling and wallowing rage, dashed into the roaring night below. Everything combined to harass the advance! To essay the now heaving and writhing ford were fated madness! The stoutest pontoons would sway and crunch like cockle-shells amidst the wrestling whirlpools! No infantry would dare the frenzied stream! The artillery must lead the van! But, before, under the sharp commands of the pilot scouts, on the farther shore, the tortuous thread of the buried ford had been tentatively assured, one caisson was swept into the black and horrible gulf beyond.

The engineers quickly determined, that to truss the

broad central span of the bridge with material at command were idle to attempt; but the broad rip-raps at the base of the overhanging piers promised secure lodgement to improvised trestles, when guyed and lashed to their unconsenting embrace, and a sinuous bridge was betimes completed, across which, at low twelve, the footmen poured, at quick, and the capture of the defiant river was assured. Nowhere, amidst the wildest fantasies of our Virginia Dreams, or the living pictures of war, in reckless abandon, had we pondered or witnessed aught like this! Above, the lowering, inky night; below, the black and raging stream and all of the wild and affrighting associations of embattled Nature! Fitting prelude these to the last reverse, before the Glorious Army of the Potomac should advance on its God-allied career of resistless victory!

Ah me! in sooth 'twas wondrous wild,
That passage of the flood,
And down the maze of Mem'ry flits
Its ghostly hardihood;
What time, at midnight's madden'd hour,
Where ghoulis waters ran,
We burst upon the crafty foe,
And forced the Rapidan!

* * * * *

Morning broke upon the moving columns, and at the first quarter the advance became more difficult; for Stuart, swayed by paltering conjectures, had discerned a possible "or" in the adventure, and was dividing attention between Stoneman's raiding force and our columns. Under constant surveillance of the ubiquitous native scouts, the afternoon was fittfully harassed by bushwhacking artillery and horse, keeping the flankers warmly under fire. The advance of the main column speedily uncovered Elley's Ford to the Fifth Corps, and this, in turn, United States Ford to Couch's Second, and this unmasked, and Sickles' Third Corps, near Hartwood Church, brought within co-operative distance, two hours after noon, three Corps, near Chancellorsville, and two in available support were within striking distance of the Confederate left. The opportunity for seizing

and securing the supreme compensation of the Campaign was there, the tactical advantages undeniable. For although, within covert and west of the Chancellor House, the prevailing undergrowth forbade reliable co-ordination and effective movement; to the east, a more open country, traversed by three highways, converging towards Marye's Heights, the key to the Confederate position, offered adequate room for manœuvre.

Dwell for a moment on the ground of vantage gained! Within four miles lay Banks' Ford, the now obvious objective, to bring Sedgwick twelve miles nearer in support—held by two Brigades of the Confederate left. In front, two Divisions of Longstreet's Corps held the heights of Fredericksburg; the right, under Jackson, from fifteen to twenty miles away, toward Port Royal, and Lee, as captured despatches revealed, still in Fredericksburg, held in blindest suspense of our approach by the formidable diversion of the First and Sixth Corps, under Reynolds and Sedgwick.

In one passing of the sun, all of the conditions of overwhelming success might be reversed. Stuart might, even now, be on a detour to apprise Lee of the menace in his rear. Jackson might, even then, have been recalled to equalize the gauge of battle. Should the vantage attained by the initiative be forfeited, and the hitherto best kept secret of the war be denied fruition, only a doubtful defensive position would remain to the Federal Commander. For once, and only this once, glorious "Old Fighting Joe" made war by proclamation.

"Which paltered with us in a double sense,
And kept the word of promise to the ear,
But broke it to the hope."

The ill-timed and boastful order, promulgated before nightfall, if it compassed any thing, elated many with the intoxication of a cozening security—that "strong, champagne, brandy-punchy feeling" that disarms the muniments of manhood, and inflamed the passions of long-range patriots, at home, to visit with condign obloquy all who should

tail “to sustain the high and sounding phrase of the manifesto.”

* * * * *

If, under this dulcet influence any one felt promoted to a Brigade command for the night, the morning call extinguished the impertinent honors. The day was passing in routine idleness, as though no husbandry of Freedom took peril from delay. An hour before noon an impromptu and unexpected advance, videtted by Pleasanton's Cavalry, upon the enemy's line, now in unknown position, masked by the ragged environment of the thickets, was ordered, Meade's column taking the river road, two Divisions of Couch's Corps the center, and Slocum, supported by Howard, the right hand road, while French's Division of the Second Corps deflected on Todd's Tavern, to the south-east.

The fateful interval of congratulatory irresolution had however, enforced upon the Confederate Commander a trial balance of probabilities. Stuart, with Fitz Hugh Lee's Brigade of Cavalry, had reported, leaving one Brigade to harass Stoneman. Recalled from the lines above Port Royal, Jackson, at 8. A. M., had effected a junction, with Anderson and McLaws, now fronting our center and left. An advance of less than three miles east of Chancellorsville, therefore, found the enemy. But no sooner had the more open country solved the difficulties of deployment, and rendered available all divisions in hand; no sooner had the enemy's lines unmasked and a strong fighting position been attained, than as sudden a return to the wilderness was commanded, the brimming euthusiasm of the men cast down, every coigne of vantage resigned, the reserve artillery, at Banks' Ford, distanced by twelve miles of difficult roads, Sedgwick as far removed from support or supporting relations, and, without serious loss or harassing resistance, the columns returned to the position last held, with the diverging roads and open space around the Chancellor House as the defensive center.

The position, as skillfully redeveloped by the engineers in the semi-confusion of the recall, lay within the Wilderness a vast forest tract, first despoiled for the reduction of iron, and now capable of reproduction only in wildest caricature.* With occasional and not far-reaching clearings adjoining the highways and habitations, withy thickets and tangled meshes of native schrubbery, fallen trees, interlaced by creeping vines, whose rebel tenacity was sedulously asserted, thorny shrubs, briars, and festive Christmas Holly, blinding pines and lancinating scrub-oaks clustered around the standing timber, far along the Orange and Culpepper roads, to the west of Dowdall's, northward for miles to the Rappahannock, and southward for leagues to the skirts of Spottsylvania, with irregular undulating elevations along the streams. The left, securely resting on the Rappahannock, and facing eastward, was held by Meade, the Second Corps prolonging the line southward to the turnpike, with Hancock's Division well thrust forward on an eminence overlooking Mott Run; and thence curving westward, the line, in front of Fairview, held by Slocum's Twelfth Corps, faced southward on a bold elevation, flanked to the west by the less elevated but more commanding Hazel Hill. To the west, with an interval of at least two Divisions fronts, in echelon to Slocum and in front of the Plank road, the Eleventh Corps prolonged the south front to the point at which the road forked into the Orange road to the south-west, and the Culpepper road to the northwest. Sickles Corps, last arrived from United States Ford, was in reserve behind the Chancellor House.

Lee's army, closely pressing our recall, took position, with McLaws' Division, opposite to our left center, Ander-

*The proverbial repetitions of History are often only coincidences of physical environment. It was, however, one of the most signal compensations of time, that, here, where swift disaster befell the halting counsels of the Union arms, after the full rounding of a year, should commence the long sap and mine to final victory.

son's Division extending westward, and Jackson's Corps continuing the envelopment of our lines to the Furnace, directly south of Hazel Hill.

From the river to the eastern slope of Hazel Grove axe, spade and bayonet speedily developed the intrenchment of the lines, augmenting every natural obstacle, and to the west, only less formidable works were in progress. Against our left and center spirited demonstrations to explore the position were maintained until nightfall, when deeming these too strong for assault, the Confederate Commander sent Stuart to interrogate beyond, and feel the right. In this, before 9 P. M. a significant but all too partial movement had been made, Col. Von Gilsa's Brigade, of Deven's Division, changing front, in the darkness, to the west.

While far to the east vigorous blows still multiplied the physical accidents and urged the defenses, within our immediate command, a vexing silence enclosed the recumbent ranks, save that ever and again a tremulous voice awakened echoes of home with the subdued refrain of a soldier's love-song. "Sour grapes," mildly suggested the artless Chaplin, perchance, in exclamatory apology to accusing hunger, and not in wanton affront to the momentary homesickness of his fellows. "Why, bless your ecclesiastical old soul, Chaplain, that's making lees of a d——d serious subject," interposed an irreverent sub-lieutenant, and with the lethean sentiment we yielded to fragmentary sleep.

* * * * *

The morning of the calamitous 2d day of May disclosed Von Gilsa's Brigade, of less than 2,000 men, the 153d Penna., on the extreme right, and the 45th, 54th and 41st N. Y., supplementing the front, within a stongly timbered woods north of the Plank road, facing west and in front of an abrupt wooded slope, which terraced an open field to the rear. Westward of our front, to the Rapidan, and northward of our flank to the Twin River, lay the undulating mazes and minatory coverts of the wilderness. Nearly at

right angles to the First, McLean's Brigade prolonged the line, with two guns in the salient angle on the road. Next, one Brigade of Schurz's Division extended east, his other Brigade, at the crisis of the day, manning low rifle-pits at right angles to the general alignment and fully half a mile in rear of Von Gilsa. Beyond Schurz, along the Plank road, Bushbeck's Brigade of Steinwehr's Division completed the position and morale of the Corps. From Steinwehr's left to Slocum's right an interval of more than half a mile, and embracing the commanding position of Hazel Grove, menaced the integrity and broke the effective continuity of the line. Had the enemy escalated this, the Eleventh Corps position would have been enfiladed, and Slocum taken in reverse. Barlow's Brigade, the indispensable reserve to this attenuated formation, was detached from the command when the disaster fell. No natural obstacle fortified or recommended the position; of artificial defenses we had little more than a naked theory of the Corps Commanded. It was held to be absurdly axiomatic that the wilderness was impenetrable even by men, from boyhood inured to the daring wilds and mountain fastnesses of Virginia, and who had been soldiered and inspired by that most adventurous of leaders, the resurrected Covenanter of the Southern Cause.

Before 9 A. M., with three companies of the 153d Penna., I was ordered to re-enforce a picket of observation, established by the 45th N. Y. down the Orange C. H. road to the south-west. On reporting to Col. Von Arnsberg, in command, about a mile to the left front, we extended his lines to the east and for several hours held the road, within the woods, in view of a broad open, probably an exhausted tobacco field, to the south, which, gently rolling, was bounded at an elevation by a densely wooded thicket. It is material, here, to note that as early as 10 A. M. we were under observation of, and exchanged shots with the enemy's videttes, at times in aggressive force, beyond the clearing.

Recalled to the Brigade at noon, we left the picket of the 45th N. Y. on the Orange Road. Our return to the lines disclosed no material change at the front, except that a few trees, felled forward, had commenced a not very formidable nor systematic abatis, but nothing in the manner of breast-works or redoubts, on the right and at the angle, and only two of the eighteen guns, with which we had turned the fords, in battery on the flank, to exalt the position or develop the defensive resources at command.

In the meanwhile, events, big with the fate of armies, had reclaimed to History the wasting hours within the opposing lines. Before daybreak Stuart had determined the impoverished entourage of the right,* and, dashing along the lower Furnace Road, at dawn found Lee and Jackson by the wayside in perplexed, almost dismayed consultation. The supreme crisis in the career of the Army of Virginia seemed imminent. To the two master-spirits the situation appeared in desperate extremity. Our left, on the river, and the center, at Fairview, vigorously entrenched, enfilading every line of approach, and enveloped by the galling thickets, commanded, it is true, by an aggressive elevation to the east, were impregnable; the force below Fredericksburg, with indeterminable numbers—the mysterious unknown factor in the illusive problem—menaced their rear; Stoneman, with ten thousand sabers, was by this time probably far advanced to their line of, at best, precarious subsistence; nothing but a wasting and doubtful aggressive, or instant retreat on the line of the Richmond R. R. seemed in reserve. Stuart now reported our right an easy prey, the flank in the air, and the rear, to the river, uncovered, and Jackson, quick to appreciate the pronounced error in position, and the opportunity, so congenial to his favorite methods, at once proposed with his 26,000 veterans, under curtain of the helpful woods, to skirt our lines and crush the dismembered right. All of the canons

*Had any pickets covered our position during the night—?

of military sanity condemned,—only its matchless audacity recommended the movement! It was the desperate adventure of a tottering cause, now “staked on the hazard of a die,” with only the one chance of palpable and mortal blundering on the part of the Union Commanders to postulate success. It was the supreme effort of Jackson’s uniquely presumptuous soldiership,—his enraptured march to death!

Quite early in the day, Gen. Hooker had inspected his lines. The open formation of the right center, quickly detected, two Brigades of Birney’s Division of the Third Corps were at once ordered to reduce the perilous interval between the positions of the Eleventh and Twelfth Corps. Graham’s Brigade was, at the same time, sent to reinforce Howard, but its services curtly declined, it was returned to its former position.

Jackson, with characteristic vehemence, promptly unleashed his inspired movement, advancing by the left from the Furnace, flanked by Fitz Hugh Lee’s Brigade of horse, and the Confederate Commander-in-Chief, in order to divert possible discovery, opened and maintained a vigorous fire against our left and center. From the advanced and far-reaching position of Birney, in front of Hazel Grove, the movement of Jackson’s column was observed quite early in its progress, and reported to head-quarters. In consequence, Gen. Hooker issued his well-known order, from which I extract:

“HEAD-QUARTERS ARMY OF THE POTOMAC. }
CHANCELLORSVILLE, VA., May 2, 1863, 9:30 A. M. }

“MAJOR-GEN. HOWARD:

I am directed by the Major-Gen. commanding to say
that * * * * *

The right of your line does not appear to be strong enough. No artificial defenses worth naming have been thrown up, and there appears to be a scarcity of troops at that point, and not, in the General’s opinion, as favorably posted as might be. We have good reason to suppose that the enemy is moving to our right. * * * *

(Signed). JAMES H. VAN ALLEN,
Brig.-Gen. and A. D. C.”

It is the fatality of colossal blunders that they inextricably involve their victims in mortal delusions, and hence this order became virtually a dead letter, supplanted by obstructive incredulity. Although, too, Birney, from his advanced lookout, had very accurately detailed the movement and determined its numbers, it does not appear that any adequate concerted movement, to fully develop its character and thwart its sinister purposes, was permitted until within the hour before noon. Until then, the critical menace was permitted to develop, evade its initial perils, and attain a position of absolute security to its plans, without a semblance of resistance.

True, the ever-restless Sickles, intuitively foreboding danger, and self-reproved under the restraints of a position, in reserve, twice during the morning went forward with a small force, with artillery, and shelled the column from the main road, to one in rear and under cover. But not until nearly mid-day, when Jackson's entire command had probably uncovered the whole of Birney's front, was Sickles permitted to attempt a reconnoissance in force. With Birney's and Whipple's Divisions of his own Corps, supported on the right by Barlow's Brigade, the only reserve of the now again isolated Eleventh Corps, and later reinforced by Pleasanton, he moved forward to the Furnace Road. Much impeded by the tangled coppice, and broken, obstructive ravines, by a well-ordered and impulsive advance he gained the line of Jackson's march, and pierced the enemy's center, in time to capture the 28th Georgia, the rear-guard of the movement. If any doubt as to the objective of Jackson's desperate exploit had been permissible before, the testimony of the prisoners now unerringly affirmed, that the movement was aggressive and not in retreat, that it carried only a fighting train, and that the renewed warnings borne to the rear, must redouble preparation for resistance, or court a disastrous defeat. It either meant this, or it meant a wanton division of forces, which no hypothesis of sanity and sincerity on the part of the Arch-

added at my request, and the promise of a fourth to follow,* as a reserve, there was only time to call the attention of the staff officers to a person in Federal uniform and without side-arms, most probably a spy, leisurely sauntering within the lines, and, as the questioning shells were repeated, in obedience to Von Gilsa's: "Major, I want you to schtop dat," the command was deployed at half distance into the thicket,

Thro' listsome woods of singing pines, and shrubs of low degree.

The advance, at once, became embarrassed, as stung by the brambles and roweled by the thorns, and with difficulty restraining the profanity of the punctures, the line broke through the belts of interlaced shrubbery and vines, under and over the promiscuous obstacles, promptly endeavoring to correct, and succeeding, perhaps, only in still further confusing alignment in the more open reaches that intervened. The philosophy of the fly in the spider's web,

*No support reached me, and my force proved barely adequate to cover the front in that brush-fog. It does not appear that any other force prospected in this direction, although Gen. Hooker's 9:30 A. M. order enjoined it:

"The disposition you have made of your Corps has been with a view to a front attack by the enemy. If he should throw himself upon your flank he (the Maj.-Gen. commanding), wishes you to examine the ground and determine upon the positions you will take in that event. * * * He suggests that you have heavy reserves in hand to meet this emergency. *

* * * Please advance your pickets for purposes of observation, as far as may be safe, in order to obtain timely information of their approval." (See order in full).

Commenting on this phase of the inquiry, Gen. Doubleday writes:

"Gen. Howard speaks in the *National Tribune* of the picket she threw out, but in every case they seem to have been sent out by his subordinates without his knowledge; in other words all knowledge of Jackson's movements was obtained by independent scouts. When they reported to Howard, it would seem from regimental histories that he wholly disapproved of these expeditions. He said that he commanded the Corps, and his subordinates were usurping his functions.

I do not deny that he picketed his front, but not against the attack coming upon his flank and rear. He did not believe that the tremors in his line were caused by Jackson's approach. He must have attributed them to Fitz Lee's Brigade of Cavalry, which was on the Orange Plank Road."

that buzzing is only an abbreviated expression for flying, was illustrated to the full. Under such conditions, onward we pressed, the occasional shells from the front flying far over us, and eliciting no response from our dumb batteries in the rear.

A mile, in front, and in the midst of a very *hades* of thickets, a long, rugged descent disclosed a shallow ravine, like a huge ditch, with an ample *berme* on either side, at the foot of a steep ridge ahead, overrun with stalwart trees and bushes impenetrable to sight. For nearly half an hour the guns had been silent; they had been heard in retreat from a more advanced position, and were expected here, when, suddenly, as the line was floundering across the farther *berme*, immense spheres of fire rolled from the crest, to left, the thud of the canisters against the tree trunks, above us, and the sharp, sneezing report called an abrupt halt, and from the debris of a dead tree, with a very pronounced and characteristic: "*Das ist was ver-r-r-damm-tes,*" Capt. Biske, of the Brigade Staff, emerged upon the scene. Voss' magnificent rendering of the Homeric line,—

"*Dumpf hin krachten im Fall und es klirreten auf ihm die Waffen,*" was instantly suggested.

The guns were too high in position to be effectively depressed, and as the right was quickly advanced, a sharp volley, to left oblique, emphasized the mad gallop of the field pieces down the long slope to the west.

Capt. Biske now communicated Von Gilsa's order to hold the ridge and prevent the re-establishment of the battery, and galloped down the now convenient road to report. With jack-knives, and the whetstone of vigorous interjections, a swath, to develop the line, and bring it into view and under command, was attempted, but, almost at once, the sharp report of the rifles in front rendered an advance necessary, to attain a more open and defensible position ahead. The Culpepper road, here, divided the left, and an open wood-road, to the north-west, the right center

of the line. Every attempt to reconnoiter, either from base or tree-top, ended in a new evolution of thickets; not the ascending grades of the recent Darwinian exploits, but the descending series of confusion worse confounded.—a “damnable iteration” of vegetable impertinences. Point of observation there was none, from which to invade the intriguing privacy of the matted wilds. The superior woodcraft of the enemy, too, at first disconcerted our “tenderfoot” interpretations. Every artifice of the wildwood was resorted to, by the bushwhacking foe in front, to control the most advanced line of fallen trees, even the stealthy movement of dwarf pines, which here abounded, when fired into, generally bringing down the enterprising Confederates to whom they were lashed.

Like the Papal Legate before the Grand Seigneur, at Versailles, “we were profoundly surprised at all we saw there, and more than all surprised to see ourselves there.” Certainly our experience justified the perplexity of a patriarchal negro—a very philosopher in brown—leader of a party of Gen. Ashby’s slaves, who while seeking the promised land, early in ’63 and reminded that they were tardy in responding to the Proclamation of Emancipation then nearly two months old, naively replied: “Taint startin’ to be nothin’ like dat, Sah! Befo’ dis, yo’ see, Mass’ Lee had mo’ to say to dat dan Massa Linkum, Sah!”

Before 3 P. M. the confronting picket line became more compact, and the fire more aggressive, when, like the crash of thunder from a cloudless sky, the command to mass columns, by battalion, was clearly heard directly in front, and repeated in detail. Substantially this despatch was immediately sent by a veteran sergeant of the 45th N. Y., with an injunction of haste:

“ON SKIRMISH LINE, ON CULPEPPER ROAD, 2:45 P. M.

“COL. L. VON GILSA,

“Comd’g 1st Brig., 1st Div., 11th Army Corps.

“A large body of the enemy is massing in my front. For God’s sake make dispositions to receive him!

(Signed), OWEN RICE, *Act. Maj. 153d P. V.*,

This despatch was promptly acknowledged by Capt. Biske, in person, who stated, that on receipt, Von Gilsa had, at once, galloped to Brigade head-quarters and sent him with instructions to me to maintain the position to extremity, but not sacrifice the men, and engage the advance, vigorously, in retreat, and with a cheery, "Glueck zu," the old campaigner again retired.*

Another listening interval of routine skirmish work and effective exchanges, and a partial movement, by left flank, in front, elicited another report to the Chief of Brigade. Of a sudden, from the direction of the wood road, one bolt descended killing a man to the right, another fell and private Rupley's arm was in shreds at the elbow, and a third exploded killing two men of the 45th N. Y., and momentarily disabling the commanding officer. With the range of the position perfectly assured, and the woods to left, front and right, rustling and crackling with the impetuous advance, the line was retired, and, reformed on the ridge in rear of the ravine, awaited the attack, the shells falling farther and farther to rear, to hasten the supposed retreat.

The enemy reached the crest of the ridge across the hollow with an alacrity only explained by the wild enthusiasm that nerved them and fused their manhood. The close array, broken to shreds of alignment by the now bleeding thickets, compacted again and again, at opportunity, by the ceaseless "Close up" of the officers, swept forward like a cyclone, reeling amidst a forest of titans. Obstacles that had harassed our advance, and hampered our retreat, yielded to the fierce momentum of an army, in three-fold

*Col. Von Gilsa informed me next morning that he had personally presented this despatch, as also Capt. Biske's confirmatory reports, to Gen. Howard and had been repulsed with taunts and the dictum that no force could penetrate the outlying thickets. A request addressed by him in 1864, to "the Committee on the Conduct of the War," that he and I be permitted to testify, touching these events, was negatived. An exemplar of sterling intrepidity, every after allusion to this disaster stirred his spirit to stormy emotion.

volume of masses, all saturated with the spirit of their almost superhuman leader. They seemed equal to any adventure, above every daunting contingency of failure, as, spurred by the reckless hazard of their isolation and the possibility of augmenting resistance in front, to overwhelming haste, they did not even reply to the resolute skirmish fire which was vigorously maintained, at stand after stand, from tree to tree, down the vexing and difficult retreat. Men moulded to the contour of fervid principles, deprecate the "pomp and circumstance" which deform the symmetry of the moulding. Looking back a score of years into that dense and deadly thicket, with all of its stern realities dwarfed by distance, and sombered by the splendid pageant-ries of interlying deeds, the confident enthusiasm and resolute ardor of that massive attack, clad in ashen grey and simple trappings, have never been surpassed. The wrath of God pervaded it, that our defeat might exalt to reverence and confirm the irresolute freedom of the slave!*

We could almost feel the hot breath of the panting foe, when Von Gilsa's: "Brig-a-de r-r-ready!" admonished that we were upon our alert, but still invisible lines. "Down, Men!" brought every man to earth, and a hurtling volley swept over us. The fire of the Brigade was premature, for, at the word of command, the enemy had halted, within the blind, most probably to effect a hurried closure of the ranks.

An opportune interval this for the rally of the skirmishers! Slow to heed the word of command, an eager group, clustering around Corp. Ackerman, stood apart, peering into a broadened opening, within a bridle path to the right, and with the vicious ring of their Belgian Rifles, the riderless horse of a General Officer, who was seen to fall, and receive the assiduous and alarmed attentions of staff and

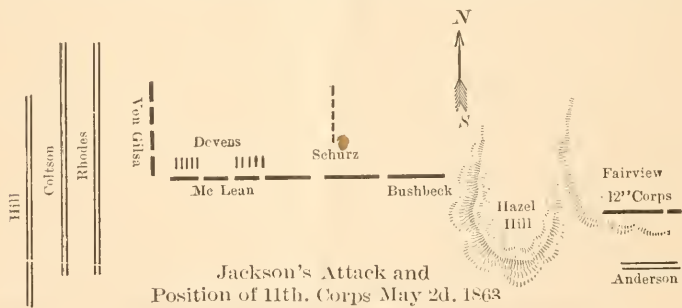
*A spirited battery on the Orange Road, had commenced shelling our south front.

escort, plunged wildly between the lines. That officer, there can be little doubt, was Stonewall Jackson.*

* * * * *

Returned to the Battalion, a passing dismay took note that no intrenched lines, no new disposition of the field, no artillery or infantry supports had been added to the defenses. But, time to prepare a bill of exceptions there was none, with the first mad rush of the howling torrent upon us. To the left of the Brigade, and down the open road, the compact masses poured, striking McLean's Brigade in flank, overlapping all efforts at deployment, and doubling its battalions back, in helpless confusion, and, with it, the left of our Brigade was borne resistlessly along.** In unresistent formation, Col. Noble's 17th Connecticut rolled up upon the 75th and 25th Ohio, and these combined on the 55th and 107th, through Barlow's interval, upon and over Schurz's lines, carrying all in helpless rout upon Steinwehr's position.

As well might they have hoped to reverse the immutable mechanics of resistance as, under self-consuming con-



*Many circumstances and the testimony of prisoners combine to locate a wounding of Jackson here. Additional evidence bearing on this point, is invited.

**Unless protected by exemplary fieldworks, it is doubtful whether, even if all of the Corps present had fronted Jackson's attack, we could have resisted long enough to have enabled Sickles to strike his right flank. Would not our effective force, of less than 11,000 men have been taken in reverse by the Confederate 26,000?

ditions, to stay that tidal wave of battle, with neither head-room nor interval of time to change front forward and deploy.

What more or better could they do? The quotable horse-power of mere bravado is, after all, a minus quantity, and experimental folly, defying the inevitable, should carry its valor in its heels. Even the Troy pound of rash resistance, when disabled by position, is outweighed by the pennyweight of bayonet or saber thrust. And here, out-positioned, out-generated, overmatched, overpowered, overwhelmed—there was nothing rational left but retreat as precipitate as the attack.

Before our front, the storm halted, hesitated, rallied, broke with shattering fury. Foiled by the piercing abatis, the enemy poured a maddened storm of lead over the now crouching ranks, and retired, with baffled rage, anew and anew to repeat the onset.*

Severely wounded, our Lieut.-Colonel retired, and with the parting command: “Major, fight that battalion, and I’ll take care of this!” Col. Glanz hastened to extricate the enveloped right, and was borne down, again recovered, and disappeared, a prisoner, in the hand-to-hand affray.

Assuming command, the two right companies were no sooner refused by me than the remnant of the 45th New York, on our left, gave way in precipitate retreat, leaving only the unmanned abatis to protect that flank. And now, with both flanks retired, in oblique echelons, the 153rd Pennsylvania stood alone to face an infuriated army and

*The extremes of the ludicrous and the horrible often take the touch of elbows on the field of battle. During the heaviest musketry fire, two small drummer boys were observed, who had sidled up to the front, with every feature agape with curiosity. No sooner commanded to the shelter of the trees, than a succession of unearthly shrieks pointed to the more remote of the two, writhing with a frightful wound in the groin. The other,—with shell on shoulder,—turned, when his drum head, struck by a bullet, exploded with a resounding report. That boy stood not on the order of his going, but with curiosity routed by an explosive drum, executed a “triple quick” in retreat.

maintain the dubious fight, reckless of its perilous isolation, until a ringing voice, "Where shall I take post, Major?" "On the right, Colonel!" gave assurance that Lieut.-Colonel Ashby had brought the remnant—a bare two hundred—of the 54th New York, to reinforce the uncovered right. The tide of battle swelled to the full, the fierce storm of lead became a hurricane, exhausting itself in mid-air, so wild had become the riotous discharges.* Less than one thousand now held the Union front, daring to hope with calmest fortitude for re-inforcement, and little knowing that all of the expected supports had been detached or swept aside, and that only the superb Bushbeck, nearly a mile to the left rear, was struggling with matchless energy to change front and disarm disaster in the very face of the already victorious torrent. When on the open plain or amidst pastoral surroundings, a combat against approximately known or determinable forces, may, in the fierce development of battle, muster all the horrors of the bottomless abyss, but amidst the entanglements of nature's wildest recesses, add to these all of the carking suspense, inspired by unseen and unknown perils, all of the terrible portents of the fire-bell at dead of night, all of the nameless dread with which the mariner treads the ocean amidst fog or storm, when all support has crumbled and the strong heart knows that the last drop of embattled blood cannot avert disaster, and only the promise of death without

*At such times, the man who is a very "bundle of habits," finds his quiver full of resources, while the poor sloven or simpleton of a single reserve force fails. A front rank man of Co. E, appealed to me that his rear rank was "shooting promiscuous like." This one "wanted one stave of being round," and, after exchange, at once resumed his duel with a singled Confederate in the thicket. Under shelter of a tree, with stagey gesture and a mumbled "ye ca-ant fool me,—ye ca-ant fool me," he repeatedly loaded, feinted and drew back,—advanced and retired, and with a wild "wh-o-o-o!" fired. His vis-a-vis at length, called up a comrade to draw the Yank's fire, and planted a ball in his exposed knee. Limping to the rear, Co. E, fairly bellowed: "d—n ye, ye fo-oled me that time,—ye fo-oled me that time," his mortification at being fooled overcoming all other suggestions.

victory remains—not Dante's pen, not Dore's pencil were tinct with agony like this.*

* * * * *

Profanity, by a majority of the German officers, was esteemed a sort of explosive exponent of the word of command—a dash of Worcestershire to appetize the every-day flavor of Casey.

Von Gilsa, too, severely tenacious of the Articles of War, found the profanity clause the one convenient article of the orthodox Military Faith which he could not keep, to emphasize his appreciation of the code. Certain it is, that under strong excitement, and when in difficult straits he was wont to be overcome by a lingual diarrhœa of sonorous expletives in the Bismarckian vernacular.

Just returned to the open plateau, in our rear, from an unsuccessful demand for reinforcements at head-quarters, and stung to the quick by the haughty rebuff of the Corps Commander, he found the remnant of his brigade still maintaining the unequal conflict and in imminent danger of being surrounded.

At once Capt. Blau, of the staff, was sent through the leaden hail to recall it, but he was shot down, intercepted in the desperate endeavor. Next Capt. Biske was despatched to essay the recall, but he, too, short of the performance, was unhorsed, cruelly wounded. And then, with pistols drawn, the intrepid German, at full gallop, broke in upon us, with thundering tones: “Gott v-d-m mich! Woll't ihr denn all in die Hoelle nein? Zurueck!” and then, with rebuked tactical propriety, “Herr Major, commandiren sie,—In re-treet, Marsch!” The almost

*The routine of War would be cloying, unless “peppered well with fun,” and the disposition to starch the shroud of events was quite generally manifested. Another duellist of Co. G, had engaged his antagonist so closely, that the latter failed to “return ramrod.” “Ki-yi—look here boys!” and Co. G, half squatted, with legs, arms and face akimbo, the ramrod planted erect between his shoulders, with a goodly portion of his scalp waving, as a guidon, from its middle. “Men are only boys grown tall,” even, under the stars.

ludicrous vehemence of the *outré* word of command, the gesticulating persuasiveness of the revolvers, and the redoubled efforts of Rhodes and Coltson to untangle their men, on our side of the abatis, enforced obedience. And none too soon, for now the splendid energy of the enemy's guns, last planted in battery, on a commanding eminence to the right rear, opened a raking fire of canister. All had been lost but honor, and, with an angry volley, the undismayed remnant faced in retreat!

Back through the shattered woods, up along the torn hill slope, and out into the smitten fields swept by the belching guns. Great Heavens!—this the looked-for support, this the culmination of our prayers and vigils for the Cause of Ages? Back to the fountains of life flew the hot blood, chilled and curdled by anguish! Not a corporal's guard in sight to tell the manner of the flight; only a lone, heavily-flying bird to reveal that God's heavens were still above us! Bare as if swept by a cyclone, only the line of deserted rifle-pits suspended below the horizon,—upon it a few mad caissons tumbling into the clamorous beyond, and all again was torturing desolation! On the right, the fierce, shrieking yells of the confused attack—in the long wooded hollows below the deserted road, away to its front, the wild tumult of Bushbeck's splendid battle, along the slopes of Hazel Hill, crackling and crashing like a forest fire in the storm-swept Alleghenies, and reverberating “the awful agonies that track the trade of war.” How the crash of the snarling guns, to the left, seemed to fret at the pitiful handful, to be gathered to their insatiable harvest! How the mad yells that burst from the fringes of the woods behind us re-echoed the mockery of our stricken legions! Not the day of days can summon sterner judgments or array more terrible realities!

You who have dared the hazard of “the imminently deadly breach,” know that all of the amenities of manhood—never so touchingly or heroically displayed as on the field of war—here atoned the fellest inhumanity of man

to man. All of the anguish centered, all of the fervor of a life-time concentrated in the effort to carry our colors to the beckoning shelter of the rifle-pits. All of the hopes of years revived and burst to fragrance, when, by a supreme effort, Brigade Commander, officers and men unfurled the Flag of the 153rd Pennsylvania over Schurz's deserted embankments. Vain the effort to stay the expanding onset! Maddened and unofficered, Coltson's and Rhodes' men, in wildest confusion of commands, soon thronged the front and, with enveloped flanks, the sheer weight of numbers forced back our exhausted fellows upon the outer slopes of Fairview.

With the gathering gloom of nightfall and the shroudings of the smoke of battle, the whole line became convulsed with the throes of the conflict, spreading far to the east, where to prevent reinforcement of the overwhelmed flank, McLaws and Anderson carried the bolts of iron death to the very teeth of Couch's and Slocum's men—a very Hell of War! Desperately, Steinwehr, with Bushbeck's enveloped heroes, sullenly retired, nearly a third of the command laid low, and, with artillery on the flanks, still prolonged the rabid contest across the ravine and upon the reinforcing slopes of Hazel Hill. Cantador, with Bushbeck's own 27th Pennsylvania, Moore's 73rd and Coster's and Jones' New Yorkers, with Hecker, De Ivernois and Hartung of Schurz's command, steadily and desperately contested the ever broadening conquest.

But soon, with delirium akin to madness, the frenzy of triumph overleaped itself. It was the bitterest sarcasm of destiny, that the well-springs of success could not assuage the consuming thirst of the over-wrought passion of pursuit. Enough had been lost to avenge the still cowering slave, and the unconscious agency of his triumph must be scourged back, lest he undo the deliverance.

For a rescuing moment the onset stood dismayed before the fierce recoil of our overpowering defeat. The resilient energies of a smitten army stood at bay against a

victorious host, entailed within the folds of the avalanche which its froward temerity had let loose from its moorings upon the broken legions.

All illusions at headquarters, all doubt, all trifling vanished with the declining day. The mortal peril begat fortitude to disarm it, if, indeed, the demoniac tumult was not only the delirious frenzy of exhaustion. Irresolution forsook the wassail of its debauchery. Dismay pleadingly touched the buckler of Faith, and drew back transformed by the daring contact.

The unfaltering Berry—the only reserve—detached from Couch's sore-pressed breastworks, where Hancock's outposts, desperately engaged, must now redouble the energies of defense—faced about with intrepid resolution, and forming his battalions across the plank road, in a low depression along the outer slopes of Fairview, and supported by gathering bodies of the broken corps, at once commenced to intrench the position. Williams was recalled, and Sickles summoned to the rescue.

Warren, of the General Staff, was now, as ever, the most dauntless personification of high, reflective courage. Assembling all available batteries of the 11th Corps, lashed to madness, the frantic horses plowed through every wind-row of obstruction, until massed on a far-searching eminence north of the road, and in rear of Berry, Wiedrich and Dilger and Heckman, aligned a long, impatient enginery of retribution. Of a sudden a very cloud-burst of flame momentarily arrested the darkling day. The Confederate advance reeled as if tottering to its death, and the confused victims of mob victory below, broke into a long, piercing wail of baffled desperation or tortured agony. Sered to blindness by the focal ray of resplendent success, over and again they attempted to seize and hold the road, but were hurled back, sickening masses of dismembered humanity, so changed as to excite neither reverence or pity, nor challenge the unbidden alms of burial.

Pleasanton, too, leisurely returning from the wing-

bound foray to the Furnace, caught the discordant echoes of the conflict, and, urged to a rescuing gallop, reached the level of Hazel Grove, thronged by mingled guns, ambulances, limbers, caissons and terror-mad fugitives now, and the tide of victory already on the slopes, borne upward by the impetuous propulsion of the charge. The crest was within grasp, and only a bare four hundred of the 8th Pennsylvania at command to arrest its capture. "Forward—trot—charge!" and, with shimmering sabers, Keenan's troopers were hurled into the maddened vortex of horrors.

Amazing sacrifice! If the mad charge but stay the frenzied onset a pitying moment for deployment of the guns; if the gaunt wolves but stay pursuit to devour the singled victims; if the baffled and reeling host but tarry, to wreak a slow and hesitating vengeance on the heroic hand-full engulfed to save a nation!

Winged by the speed of furies, twenty guns plunged into battery along the menaced crest—not in vain had the squadrons charged and died—and dashed into endless night the returning wave of battle, as it broke over the bloody parapets. Again and again it rebounded to the charge, until blown from the very muzzles of the guns, it was flung back, quivering, a reeking mass of groans and imprecations, commingled human offal now, appalling even to men, whom familiar contact with death had blunted to charnel horrors. Forty Napoleons and Parrotts more, gathered and planted by Capt. Best, between and in rear of the magnificently vengeful Eleventh Corps Batteries on the right, and Pleasanton's incessant service of double canisters from Hazel Hill, swelled the chorus of defiance, and hurled the manacles of death farther and yet farther into the thronged and shrieking thickets. So fierce the scorching vengeance, so terrible the storm of retribution, that when Col. Crutchfield massed the Southron guns, to recoup the field, they were swept into silence, almost annihilated by the withering blast.

And soon the woods, afire, added an appalling horror, and overcast with pallid terror the ghastly array of perils of this most hideous night in the annals of war. Deep in the woods the fiery trails of shells left flickering mementos. Fanned to a glow, and now aflame, the terrorized wounded writhed in tortured agonies of despair, and both friend and foe paused aghast at the maddening spectacle.

Only one paltering moment, rashly consecrate to feeling and sentiment! A mockery these, to enslave their half-hearted votaries to passionless apathy!

Accidental masses of the enemy, welded by as fortuitous impulses and swayed by wavering purposes, with maddest yells, defying word of command and co-ordination of energies, now vaulting the parapets below the grove, and now leaping Berry's lines, had, ever and again, been blown to atoms, or shattered into inert fragments of panting soldiery. The musketry fire the while, with arch and sustained vigor, in the intervals of the charge, swept the crescent of resistance with scourging hail. By a more concentrated impulse, all at last obeyed the cumulative, decisive effort to break our lines, now compact and co-operative, an impregnable defense to the wildest assault.

Reinforced by French on the right, Berry had strengthened his position in double lines, with log breastworks, which no assault could overleap. Williams had closed the stubborn front of Fairview to possible capture. Pleasanton's sorely-tried Batteries, thus long supported only by the 6th New York and the 17th Pennsylvania Cavalry, had been reinforced by the 110th Pennsylvania, the advance of Whipple's division, and remnants of Bushbeck's heroes, and Birney, Whipple and Barlow were at call to form column of brigades in rear of the guns, to repel the crucial charge. The First Corps, too, which at sunset had gone into bivouac on the south side of U. S. Ford, was hurriedly summoned to advance, and before 10 P. M. had arrived on the Elley's Ford Road, in support of the right flank of the army.

When the final charge came, all of the batteries and their supports had been attuned to conscious and heroic unison. The full moon cast a ghastly pallor or denser shadow on all afield. The outer ordeal of shell, shrapnel and case had been ventured and endured, and the huge mass, more dense in the glamour of the half-light, had come within touch of the canister—the dreadful Simoon of Battle.

On the crest, to rear of our crouching lines, in shadowy silhouette, as the smoke wreaths parted from the flash of the guns and the fierce rush of the missiles, the battery-men broke to left and right, and rallied and dispersed at shortening intervals in silent, ardored, desperate manipulation of the champing guns, until the white heat of combat glowed with “the rapture of the fight.” The collective energy of the defense became invincible—the machinery of wrath adjusted to the indomitable will. And, from the blazing arc of shattering bolts, the pendulum of death released a concerted battery stroke with every heart throb; the simoon of destruction struck havoc with every responsive pulse-beat, and the flame-specked night, within the thickets, spread new confusion into the pitiless, remorseless carnage. Even the splendid heroism—the vaunted invincibility of the Stonewall Corps, summoned by dying lips to superhuman effort, lashed to the verge of despair, broke before that wild tornado of fury. We could almost feel the throbbing anguish of their souls, that, with this dethroned victory, foreign recognition was lost forever. Broken by the wilderness into infuriated confusion of commands, carried by the most riotous carnival of victory to the very teeth of the mouthing batteries—as often stranded on the rocks of a scourging failure; anew, goaded by the fall of their marvelous leader to maddened vengeance, as often crushed by the plunging iron hail, driven back to bewail the blight of his death-laurels; all discipline distraught by the siren of success; entangled in the pitfalls of the night, entailed in the terrible cross-fire of the batteries,

unmanned by the horrible carnage, all hope dispelled, madness gave way to collapse, and shuddering, bleeding, heart-broken they resought the thickets. The Tigress of Victory had devoured her whelps, and gorged by the unnatural and abhorrent prey, rebounded to cover in sensuous exhaustion !

Every energy, within our lines was now bent to complete the intrenchments and make impregnable the cordon of defense ; and only the wails of the dying across the ensanguined field, arched by the sparkling trail of shells, prolonged this most haunting episode of war.

* * * * *

The defense of the Eleventh Corps, provoked by the malignant charges* that have aspersed it, may be briefly reviewed, as follows :

In position, faulty below the thinnest veneering of military sanction, condemned in advance by Hooker, Sickles, and every chief of Division and Brigade present, and by every military critic who has traversed it since, the Corps was exposed to inevitable disaster.

Not only were the eight hours of repeated and consistent warnings not employed in the construction of breastworks, redoubts or epaulments, in change of front, effective disposition of the artillery and other prerequisites of flank defense ; not only was the Commanding General's order of 9:30 A. M. virtually ignored ; not only was Graham's proffered reinforcement spurned ; not only was Barlow's withdrawal in support of Sickles' emasculated counter-movement acquiesced in, and accompanied, at a critical time, by the Corps Commander in person ; not only was Sickles' movement, which eliminated all but one division of the reserve of the entire army, needlessly and idly detained at

*Commencing with a Council of War, convened before the retreat at which Gen. Howard voted to remain and fight, "because," he alleged, "his Corps had behaved badly, and he wished to give it an opportunity to redeem its reputation."

the Furnace ; not only was the Eleventh Corps thus fatally isolated, at a wide interval, with its forces impoverished, under flank exposure to impending attack, and without natural or adequate artificial impediments to assault ; not only were independent efforts to reconnoiter rebuked as usurpations of authority, but every officer—Devens, Schurz, Schimmelpfennig, Von Gilsa, Col. Noble, Capt. Farmer and others—who bore to the Corps Commander despatches or personal reports, detailing the progress of the turning column, locating the massing attack and defining batteries in position on the Orange Road—has testified that they were met by a cavalierly contempt and denial.

Gen. Doubleday, the distinguished historian of the campaign, after exhaustive trial, sums up as follows :

“It is always convenient to have a scape-goat in case of disaster, and the German element in the Eleventh Corps has been fiercely censured, and their name become a by-word for giving way on that occasion. It is full time justice should be done, by calling attention to the position of that Corps. I assert that when a force is not deployed, but is struck suddenly and violently on its flank, resistance is impracticable. Not Napoleon’s old Guard, not the best and bravest troops that ever existed, can hold together in such a case, for the first men assailed are * * * driven into a huddle, and a huddle cannot fight, for it has no front and no organization. * * * Couch remarks that no troops could have stood under such circumstances, and I fully agree with him.”

So strong had, at one time become the popular conviction of deserved dishonor to the Eleventh Army Corps, so convenient, on the hypothesis of its recreancy, the escape for those responsible for the miscarriage of the campaign, that all of the specific causes of failure, all other considerations, the previous halt and surrender of the initiative, the subsequent recall of the aggressive, the large preponderance of the combined Union strength, of which, following these events, enough was kept out of action, to have rendered overwhelming victory assured, and the fact that, but for the

inexplicable abandonment of Hazel Hill, the general position would have been stronger after than before the disaster, have been lost sight of in order to confirm the rank-est injustice. And, therefore, while, with extenuating charity, Patriotism may condone the faults of the Commanders, though our eagles went down on that irresolute and bloody field, Heaven and Earth attest that the Eleventh Army Corps is guiltless of dishonor.

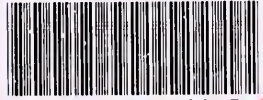
* * * * *

At break of day, on the next, a lowering Sunday morning, the Corps was in column along the plank road, to change position to the extreme left, and occupy the works abutting on the river, last held by Meade.

The silent but searching scrutiny of the reserve battalions by the wayside seemed, as we marched by, poignant daggers of pitying reproach, until the cheery voice of the Commandant of a New York regiment hailed and asked: "What regiment is that, sir?" "The 153rd Pennsylvania, sir," was the prompt reply, and "Battalion--Present arms!" the quick response,—the grateful honors and soldierly reward of our comrades. Once more the manhood returned to the wan faces of my sorrowing men, and, while deploring that the shadows had again broadened and darkened on the fields of the Nation's peace, for us the storm-lit yesterday had only this abiding sadness, that there, amidst the fierce, scorching glare of the still smoking woods behind us, our fallen comrades had met a maddening sepulture by fire.

Morituri te salutabant, Patria cara!

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